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**AFRICAN MILITARY IN
NATIONAL CONFERENCES,
A CHALLENGE TO NATIONAL SECURITY.
A CASE OF NIGER.**

BY

LIEUTENANT COLONEL TAHIROU DJIBO
Army of Niger

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AFRICAN MILITARY IN NATIONAL CONFERENCES, A CHALLENGE
TO NATIONAL SECURITY. THE CASE OF NIGER.

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

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African democracy will not have the clearness of the days after spring storms. It will be painful, since the cultural and moral transformation that is involved, will be nothing but dramatizing.

Albert Bourgi and Christian Casteran

INTRODUCTION

Since 1990 the worldwide political environment has been changing at a scale and speed never previously suspected possible. The whole eastern bloc collapsed, and the storm made it to Africa. But it was not without problems. It was not easy to get rid of communism and to bring democracy in countries which have been communist for decades. One just has to look at the various demonstrations, attempted coups d' etat, breakups and even civil wars in the former eastern bloc countries. It's not easy either to bring democracy to Africa, which has a reputation of dictatorship, single-party states, military leaders, political intolerance and so forth. The procedure of democratization is comparable to the one in the former eastern bloc countries: fed up populations, a hand of the western bloc in overthrowing the leaders and straight into a democratic process. But, if the overall procedure is the same in Africa as elsewhere, the process of democratization is not the same. In fact, even within Africa it differs from one country to another. Nonetheless, there are some countries experiencing the process which arrives at a so-called "national conference." That is a kind of imposed political conference between labor, students, political parties and representatives of all parts of the social fabric. The purpose of the meeting is to note the failure of the previous system of government and to take actions in order to reorganize the country in a democratic manner.

Many Subsaharan countries like Benin, Congo, Togo, and Niger were involved in this process. It happens to be that all of them are former French

colonies. We will see that this is not just a result of a combination of circumstances. All of these countries were also led by military governments with a single-party system. Since military was involved in the process of national conferences, our purpose is to try to know how the military came to be involved in this process, how they were treated by the national conferences, and how the way they were treated had an impact on the national security of the country. Yet, because the experience lived by each country was unique, we will not seek to analyze the process of democratization throughout all the countries. Instead, we will focus our study on the national conference held in Niger and its consequences on national security.

THE LEGACY OF MILITARY LEADERSHIP

Post-independence Africa is known for its political instability. In a continuing change of leadership, the military in Africa came into power in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Most of them were propelled to the leadership of their countries by means of coups d'etat in a very bad political and economical environment. Instead of taking advantage of the trust people placed in them in the early years of their leadership to make a radical change to improve the situation of the country, African military in power continued the same way of government, or even when they tried to develop their own system, it was, most of the time, worst than the previous one.

The sociopolitical environment before the military took over power was based on the colonial way of government. The colonial system needed an authoritarian system of government to make people work for the colonialist. For sometime in several countries, people were reduced to the level of slaves, with no rights and with repression as the method of government. After independence, the first African leaders adopted almost the same methods of governing. Authoritarianism was a legacy of the colonial system. "The

colonial regimes (British, French, Belgian and Portuguese) were of course authoritarian, and they bequeathed an authoritarian inheritance to African politics."¹

The most common expression of this authoritarianism was the one-party state. The pretext for developing this kind of system was that the low level of political awareness of African people, the weakness of the young economies, and the ethnic heterogeneity of the countries concerned cannot suffer the division that multiparty systems would certainly entail. Abiola Irele commented on this phenomenon: "The one-party state has been rationalized as the political expression of the ideology of development, as the means of concentrating the political community's collective energy and will on the problems of nation building."²

This system seemed to work at first because of the excitement of being independent and also because it was at least better than the colonial system. People generally supported the new leaders, although they were in many cases chosen or helped to be placed in the positions of leadership by the colonialists. However, by the end of the first decade, things were getting worse, economies were declining, and in some countries such as Niger in 1966-1974, several years of drought began to create areas of starvation. Politically, repression, corruption, and nepotism became the most common methods of government. These methods developed a small "bourgeoisie" which plundered the small resources of the country. At the same time, the ties with the former colonial power were so close that one could imagine its hand everywhere.

This was one aspect of the political, economic and social landscape prior to military coups in Africa in the early 1970s. Sometimes a military coup was the result of the Cold War struggle in this area. It was sometimes the case

that just because the first leaders had a different ideology from one of the Cold War protagonists that they were overthrown. It was in an environment of growing dissatisfaction that the military took power. But did they do better?

THE MILITARY ERA

The military era in Congo, Niger, and Togo, as examples, runs from 1967 (Togo) until now (Togo). The problem for the military in governing was that they were experts neither in politics nor in economics. Their leadership experience was in the colonial army where they were generally NCOs and their experience as officers in the new national armies. If they had dealt with the problems of leadership before, it was in the army. So, most of the time they were faced with problems they were not prepared to deal with. The military leadership was characterized by a lack of representativeness, a lack of democracy, and economic failure. When the military came to power in Africa, it was generally in the name of relieving the country of all the wrongs that the previous government had committed against the people. This assumed that it is part of the mission of the armed forces to protect the people. Therefore, it is perfectly legal that they intervene when politicians lead the country into chaos. By doing so, the senior officers who take charge of the country try to resolve the problems of government legitimacy with respect to the people and the institutions, and also the problem of representativeness with respect to the other elements of the armed forces. It was normally not difficult to gain the confidence of the people during the first couple of years of their leadership.

Unfortunately, the problem of representativeness is a permanent problem. It is always asked--did the military worry about it? In fact, they worried more about not being deposed than about governing on behalf of someone. Having taken over power by force, they knew they also could be deposed by

force and, in their minds, the only force that could do it was the armed forces themselves. Therefore, what they did most of the time, was surround themselves with a small group of persons who they believed could protect them from being overthrown. Generally they chose some high ranking officers and some friends or relatives to rule the country even if they had no political or technical competence. They were generally people of the same ethnic group or from the same geographic area. In my opinion, the question of representativeness is a key problem because when problems arise, it determines within the system the reaction of each element in the political or sociological structure based on the community of interests that binds them.

In the case of Niger, although some politicians complained that the different presidents who were all from the Western region, favored this region, the most important fact among the military when the national conference came into play was the cleavage that developed between the senior leadership and the rest of the military. The latter knew that the military leaders did not lead the country on their behalf. They were not better prepared nor better paid than the others. The reasons given in their defense by the leaders were that they didn't want to be criticized by the civilians for favoring the armed forces. At the same time, the national police, the political police, and the presidential guard were being given more equipment and advantages than ever before.

Beside the problem of representativeness, the military era is in general characterized by a lack of democracy. Like the governments they replaced, the military system of government was characterized by a one-party system and an authoritarian style. Coming from a military environment which praises authoritarianism almost as a positive trait for leadership, the military sometimes led the country just like they would lead a military unit. They

generally suspend the Constitution, dissolve the Parliament and, thus ban the exercise of all the constitutional rights. Many people were jailed or even killed for political disagreement with the leaders. This lack of democracy by military governments is so well known that we need not emphasize it here. Beside that, there were of course adjacent problems like corruption and nepotism which undermined all endeavors to improve the weak economies.

To illustrate the economic failure of the military leadership, we can choose just three characteristic areas: the debt, the resources available, and the standard of living in the rural areas. The problem of African countries' heavy debt is known by the international financial and economical community. Since it is a debt, it has to be paid, most of the time with the little resources available in the countries, delaying or sometimes preventing the countries' development programs. But debt is a result of economic failure. To resort to debt, you have to lack money; and to lack money, either you haven't created opportunities to generate money and wealth in the country, or you waste that money in prestige projects and corruption instead of investing it in the right way. African leaders "distinguished themselves by a bureaucratic and patrimonial management of the economy in which among other traits, the tentacle-like development of the public sector is the testimony. The leadership of companies has often been entrusted to friends of the leading group (if not friends of the head of state himself) and their functioning almost always followed lines that had nothing to do with the general interest."³

The lack of resources derives often from the trend of international markets. African countries are generally raw material producers, receiving the most important part of their revenues through selling raw materials. The trend for the last decade has been that the prices of raw materials are

getting lower and lower, depriving the producers of their most important source of financial resources. This lack of resources can be so drastic in some countries that the workers may not be paid for several months.

The standard of living in rural areas is another measure of the state of the economy. Actually in African countries, the majority of the population in rural areas has no access to electricity, running water and other amenities in their homes. A survey showed that actually the standard of living in Africa is lower than it was during the post-independence era. Things are getting worse instead of improving.

The problem of representativeness, the lack of democracy, and economic failure are the results of military leadership in most of the countries they led. These results created the conditions of instability which led to national conferences. In Niger, after the death of the former president, General Kountche, who was seen as very authoritarian, General Ali Saibou who took the lead, tried to restore more confidence by releasing all the political prisoners and letting people criticize his actions publicly. This "relief" was known as "decrispation." He also tried to resolve the problem of representativeness by organizing parliamentary and presidential elections (although there was a serious question about the democratic nature of such elections in a one-party state). However, this was not enough to avoid going to the national conference--it was too little, too late. The internal environment was already in flux and the external environment had just accelerated the process.

THE INTERNAL ENVIRONMENT BEFORE THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE

We already discussed the internal environment that led to the national conference when we talked about the legacy of the military leadership and the political, economic, and social conditions leading to a national conference.

In Niger, discontent began around 1985 after many workers were fired pursuant to an economic plan. People began to speak out, criticizing the government, despite the risk in doing so at that time. Beside that, throughout the years, the labor unions and the students had organized a series of demonstrations, strikes, and rallies to add to the pressure. The most important event, however, occurred on 9 February 1990, when, during a students' rally, the police opened fire, killing three students and injuring several of them. It was the opportunity to push a government already under pressure and to ask for a national conference.

THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

If the internal environment was the determining factor to force the leaders to organize a national conference, the external environment, however, must not be underestimated. Let's take just two sides of this external environment--the fall of the Eastern European governments and the pressure exerted by the French government for democratization. While the fall of the Berlin Wall symbolized the victory of a system (capitalism) over another system (communism), for many African people the fall of the former eastern bloc governments symbolized liberty and victory of the people over their dictators. The former eastern bloc governments and the African military governments were organized in almost the same way: one-party states, authoritarian governments, lack of democracy, economic failure, etc. . . . Thus, when African intellectuals saw for the first time on television in 1989 the riots in Romania and the tragic end of the leaders of that country, they thought everything was possible in their own countries.

The political leaders of that time cannot deny the impact of these images on those who later on pushed for a national conference. But the images were

just an illustration of the irresistible process of democratization; with or without these images, African people would go through this process.

In this international environment of democratization, the pressure of the French government was a very important element on the way to the national conference. In fact, without the will of the French government, there wouldn't be national conferences in Africa.

The idea of a national conference is a French product, an Africanized version of the famous "etats generaux" held during the French Revolution of 1789. We are not saying there wouldn't be democracy in African countries without the French, but the process would certainly be different, as it is actually in former English colonies for instance. In fact, some political analysts see the national conference as "a smart form of neocolonialism. . . . France imposes the Benin model without considering the local specifications . . . and all the countries where a national conference has been held are in the area of responsibility of the French Department of Cooperation"⁴ which is considered by many as the tool to perpetuate French colonialism. This will of the French government to "help" the democratization of African countries, was publicly expressed at La Baule, France in June 1990 by French President Francois Mitterrand during a meeting between French and African leaders. Speaking about French aid to African countries, he made it clear that this aid would be more enthusiastically provided to countries that accept the evolution toward democracy, and the French attitude toward aid more tepid with regard to regimes that don't accept this process.

The result: those of the presidents who publicly rejected the idea of national conference like Hissene Habre of Chad and Moussa Traore of Mali were simply overthrown. These pronouncements and events were the internal and

external environment leading to the national conference. How about the national conference itself, its objectives, and its process?

THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE

At this point of our analysis, our intention is not to tell in detail what happened in Niger's national conference. Beside the fact that we must focus on the role of the military in the conference, the details of it were widely diffused by the media. Therefore, it would be more appropriate to try to understand the objectives of the national conference and how, according to these objectives, the military was treated. However, we will first ask the question of the legitimacy of national conferences. If we consider the national conference as a kind of war between the "democratic forces" and the "reactionary forces" (which at least the democratic forces did) and if we apply the Clausewitzian trinity of ends, ways, and means, we identify the objectives as the ends, the participants (legitimacy) as the means and the ways would be the way the participants managed to destroy what they perceived as the center of gravity--the armed forces. The organizers of the national conference may not even have heard of Clausewitz. Yet they may have implemented his theory just by carrying the process out in a logical manner.

THE LEGITIMACY OF THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE (THE MEANS)

A national conference is a way to bring democracy to a country. We will let prosperity tell us if it's the best way. Yet, some political analysts raised questions about the legitimacy of the principle of the national conference. Beside the fact that it can be seen to be to exacerbate ethnic division because people have the tendency to blame the president, his native region and his ethnic group all together, it can also be seen to be a waste (of money) because financing the session could be very expensive while the whole nation stops working. (At least \$12 million was spent in Congo in the

organization of the national conference.) However, the most important critique based on the legitimacy question is that "the national conference is an antidemocratic gadget."⁵ The problem here is another one of representation. Do the students and the labor unionists truly represent the people? Why don't they want to go to elections against the presidents (which is the democratic way to come into power)? Of course, the participants have the answer. They feel like they represent the whole nation because they have among them representatives of all socioprofessional associations of the country, and going to elections in a one-party state system is absurdity in any case.

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE (THE ENDS)

Basically the national conference has only one principal objective--to bring about democracy in the country. As Jean Pierre Fabre says, "Without a national conference we will certainly have a multiparty system, but not democracy."⁶ We can also agree with Albert Bourgi that the objective is "to abolish the one-party regime that ended in a confiscation of power by one man or one clan, and to build the foundations of a multiparty-based democracy."⁷ To be more specific, in the case of Niger, Maitourama Kadey unveiled the mission assigned to the national conference:

. . . concretely, the mission was assigned to the Niger national conference to demolish and make disappear a set of historically formed powers and institutions, and to build the foundations of another, more compatible with the aspirations of the people of this country; in short, to make Niger be a democratic state with all the related attributions.⁸

While the means and the ends are practically the same regardless of the country, the ways to achieve these ends may be different from country to country because what was perceived as the center of gravity was different.

THE CONFERENCE AND THE MILITARY (THE WAYS)

The process in the national conference in Niger, Togo, and Congo seems to be roughly the same: first, identify and destroy the power in place and all its elements, then rebuild a new structure. As Kadey says, "The national reactionary forces and their command structure would be identified and liquidated, the same that by their actions led the country to the edge of the abyss."⁹

The whole problem here is to identify these reactionary forces. In my opinion, it is as important to identify these reactionary forces as it is in war to identify the center of gravity of the enemy. Meeting the challenges to national security depends on this identification. In Congo, attacks were focused on the president, the single party, and the political intelligence agency. The armed forces themselves were safe. Therefore, it is understandable that in Congo the political climate was relatively peaceful. The armed forces had one small reaction after the national conference. It was when they discovered a secret document advising the new Minister of Defense to replace the Chief of Staff and the major unit commanders because they were from the North of the country. But the problem was rapidly resolved and now the armed forces in Congo have the confidence of the population and the political parties. The Chief of Staff even sometimes arbitrates political conflicts between parties.

In Niger (and in Togo) the problem was different. In those countries the argument was the following: since the president is military and leads the country on behalf of the armed forces, the armed forces are the main reactionary forces that must be destroyed (together with the single party and the police).

Here, we must say in the defense of the "democratic forces" that anyone in their position would identify the armed forces as a "reactionary force." Everything was done by the military regime to give credit to this belief. First, when they came into power, the military leaders always talked on behalf of the armed forces. Then, they ruled the country with high-ranking officers in the key places in the government and decision-making councils. Finally, when it came to repress demonstrations or strikes, the government used the military despite a law that states that use of the military must be the last resort. In ruling in this fashion, military regimes wanted to create in the minds of the people the impression that the military (as a whole) benefit from the regimes and are ready to defend them. This determination of the military leaders in power to confuse people in this matter continued until the eve of the national conference. I recall when I was given the mission (as head of a small committee) to write a draft of the opening speech of the armed forces in the national conference, my committee found it very important to warn the participants not to be confused. There is a difference between the military leaders involved in politics (who could be blamed if necessary) and the institution that the armed forces represent that hadn't benefited from 17 years of military regimes. We were willing to demonstrate this assertion and the danger in blaming the institution in the national conference. When this first draft was presented to the then Chief of Staff, he just crossed out this part and argued that he didn't want to be at loggerheads with "the elders." He was willing to save his partners, but not the armed forces. Therefore, it's not surprising that the "democratic forces" identified the whole armed forces as a reactionary force. They were driven into this belief and just couldn't imagine it could be a different way.

THE DESTRUCTION

Once the reactionary forces were identified, the second phase was to destroy them.

In Niger, the "liquidation" of the armed forces was done in a very methodical but passionate manner. The logic of destruction began months before the national conference; it continued to play during the conference and even after the conference.

Before the national conference, the destruction began with the diffusion of numerous tracts, then continued with the release of rebels caught by the military, and finally culminated in the attendance quota allocated by the preparatory committee.

Months before the national conference, there was a proliferation of tracts, almost every day, accusing and slandering the political authorities (mostly the military), sometimes focusing on their private lives. It didn't matter if the stories were fabricated, the defendant had no way of defending himself anyway. The purpose of these tracts was to make the people reject the military, to create a rupture between the people and the military. It worked. Many military personnel were insulted or attacked in the streets during this period, simply because they were in uniform.

The second element of the destruction prior to the national conference was the release of rebels. A key juncture was a trial held in April 1991, when 44 Tuaregs involved in rebellious activities were simply released. The point of citing this trial is that the army felt it was part of the demoralization plan, and indeed, it did deeply demoralize the soldiers. Briefly, the matter concerned the so-called Tounfaminir and Iferouane cases. In Tounfaminir, a group of Tuaregs planned to attack Republican Guard elements with daggers, knives, and swords in order to take back a Toyota vehicle confiscated by the

"prefet" (governor) and given to the Republican Guard. After the Tuaregs charged a car to get to Tounfaminir, they bound and dropped off the chauffeur halfway there, but were caught by the Republican Guard and handed over to judicial authorities. In the Iferouane case, a group of 25 Tuaregs planned to attack Iferouane (in the Air mountains). Coming from the well-known Libyan Islamic legion training camps, they passed through Arlit, where they stole dynamite from the uranium plants. Intelligence, and the breakdown of their vehicles, facilitated their capture after several days of pursuit on foot in the mountains.

These two groups were tried in April 1991, and the result was that they were freed because there was no evidence that they had intended to attack the locations. Everyone agreed at the time that the decision was a political sentence in order to cool down tension between the Tuaregs and the government. The problem was that in doing so, the government created frustration within the military. The soldiers were particularly upset. Why did they have to put their lives in jeopardy if the opponent once caught was then released after a "trial."

After the tracts and the strange trial, the humiliation of the armed forces continued through decisions taken by the national preparatory committee of the national conference. First, there was no military representation on this committee, whereas almost all of the other important socioprofessional groups were represented. Then the slap came with the assignment of quotas of representation in the national conference. While groups like students or labor unionists had 100, the entire armed forces, the police, the Republican Guard, the customs and the environment agents together had 40. In addition, they didn't have the right to vote. (Even when we made some arrangements at the beginning of the conference to add a few more personnel and to have the

right to vote, we were just allowed to vote within the "associations" group in which 69 associations had only one vote). This was the last straw in the process of weakening the armed forces before the national conference, preparing them for effective destruction during the national conference.

To achieve the destruction of the armed forces during the national conference, the democratic forces pursued a two-fold process: bringing before the conference the maximum number of matters in which military were involved, and dividing the armed forces to prevent a possible coup.

Among the 185 affairs selected overall by the preparatory committee, just a few of them were debated by the participants. The large majority of the topics debated, however, happened to be affairs with military involvement. One can of course argue that since the military was in power for 17 years, it was not surprising that they were involved in most of the cases, therefore denying the argument that the affairs were chosen because of the involvement of the military. But the military did not see it that way. They didn't understand (or rather they understood quite well) why the conference sent two former army colonels to jail for the execution of one major (even if he was vice-president) ordered 16 years ago by the then president (the Sani Sounna Siddo Case) while the conference never even talked about the public executions of tens of political opponents during the civilian single-party system.

The military didn't understand either how the names of soldiers could be publicly brought into a corruption investigation because ten years ago they had signed to borrow 1,000 CFA francs (4 dollars). (Their chief hadn't told them the money had come from corruption.) By contrast, nobody talked about a former civilian government official who chalked up many years ago his billion CFA francs (4 million dollars) or about many other well-known civilians who built their fortunes with corruption money. We can keep on citing the cases.

Sometimes the affairs brought before the participants were very sensible: the Tchintabaraden case dealt with an attack on the locality of Tchintabaraden by the Tuareg rebels and the reaction of the army was considered disproportionate. But why debate in detail for days an attempted coup d'etat in 1983 while the authors of the coup had been amnestied previously by the conference itself? The debate on these affairs was a way, not only to show the involvement of the military in dirty business, but also to have the opportunity to attack publicly the whole armed forces. Despite the efforts of some lucid participants who warned of the danger of blaming or insulting one's country's own armed forces, many participants didn't pass up the opportunity. When the army chiefs complained before the presidium of the conference about this trend, the president of the presidium said something like: "The civilians have been under pressure for 17 years under military government; now that they have the opportunity, we must let them unwind." Thus, all these affairs were brought before the national conference participants to "let them unwind," regardless of the consequences on the military. There was another way to weaken the army, far more dangerous and with far more challenging results for national security--that is, to seek to divide the armed forces.

In the process of cracking the armed forces, conference strategists realized that they couldn't safely criticize or blame the armed forces if the latter remained coherent and united. Therefore, they undertook to divide them. For some, it was a matter of keeping the army busy trying to resolve its own problems in order to prevent it from attempting a coup d'etat during the national conference. They also sought to act in such a way that the armed forces would never again be able to carry out a coup d'etat.

In any case, the principle of dividing the armed forces was accepted by the strategists. The opportunity came with the Tchintabaraden affair. Some

young lieutenants and NCOs were involved in this affair and stood accused of having massacred Tuaregs or having executed Tuareg rebels. The young officers and NCOs didn't want to testify before the conference participants because they had been given orders to do what they did. While the military leaders were trying to resolve the problems with the presidium of the national conference, some politicians, noticing the discontent, jumped into the gap in order to manipulate the young officers. The result was a mutiny of these officers and the creation of a "movement," ("mouvement des lieutenants et sous lieutenants"). The leaders of this movement went directly before the participants of the national conference with grievances. They were adopted by the conference as the future leaders of a "new look" army. The president of the presidium of the national conference couldn't restrain himself from saying that they had just broken open an open door. From that time on, there were two armed forces general staffs: the traditional official one in the general staff headquarters and the new one baptized by the national sovereign conference. Adding to the confusion, the leaders of the "movement" took their orders directly from the presidium of the national conference. The result was an indescribable mess within the army. The accepted insubordination, although it effectively kept the armed forces busy during the national conference, has had very serious repercussions on national security.

THE CONSEQUENCES

The consequences of the attempt to destroy the armed forces in the national conference were beyond what the critical strategists expected. Most of them thought it was worth destabilizing the army from the beginning to the end of the conference to prevent any threat coming from the army side. The reaction came later as a movement of soldiers called "la troupe" sprung up. In addition, the intensification of the rebellion came into play.

"LA TROUPE"

On 28 February 1992 the world was struck by news coming from Niamey (the capital city of Niger). Soldiers in mutiny had occupied the national radio station, detained the President of the High Council of the Republic (the legislative branch of the transitional government) and the Minister of Interior, and were asking for the dismissal of the Deputy Chief of Staff of the armed forces. The official reasons were to ask for the payment of salaries and other allowances. The soldiers did almost whatever they liked for about a week, from arresting people (even some high-ranking officers) to talking on the national radio. We won't discuss in detail what happened since it was reported widely in the media. What is interesting is to try to find out why the phenomenon occurred. The reality may be far more complex than a simple problem of salary.

In this analysis, the purpose is not to support or even to justify what happened. The military reaction is even more not susceptible to justification, since, whatever the reasons behind it were, the phenomenon went beyond military regulations. It was not even a regular mutiny. Generally, a mutiny is directed by soldiers against their military superiors, for some reasons of discontent within the military environment. The "la troupe" event was, for the soldiers, to put aside the military hierarchy and to react directly against the political leaders, which of course cannot be accepted in a democratic society. But, the "la troupe" event was not a coup d'etat either, since it was not directed against the institutions, and the reality of it didn't support the coup version some opportunists tried to give it. It was a show of force. Having said that and to go back to the causes of this reaction on the part of the soldiers, my opinion is that this movement of "la troupe" occurred because of a combination of several factors.

First: This reaction could have been the result of the frustration of the armed forces during the sovereign national conference. I have already discussed how debate within the conference focused on subjects in which the military were involved and how discussion had not refrained from seeking to demoralize the military. While the participants in the sovereign national conference had decided to go to war against the military, the latter had already decided not to fight. They assumed that they didn't know how to fight with words. If they had to fight, it would be with their guns and, in this case, it would be against their own people. The result might have been the same situation we are now seeing in Togo or in Zaire. Thus, when the armed forces decided finally to participate in the national conference (after tough discussion) they hoped the participants would realize the "sacrifice" they had made and, therefore, focus their criticism against some military leaders and not the institution itself.

Confident in their rights, and intoxicated by their brand new sovereignty, the participants decided instead to take revenge on the armed forces. The result was deep frustration within this institution. If it was rather easy to explain to the officers the rules of the game, it was a real challenge to make the NCOs and the soldiers understand that we had to take the shots without reacting. Four months after the sovereign national conference, the "la troupe" event could be seen as the counterattack of the soldiers against the national conferences having lumped the armed forces together.

Second: The "la troupe" event could also be the result of many accumulated problems in the armed forces. In spite of 17 years of military rule and what the participants may have thought during the national conference session, the armed forces of Niger had many basic problems. The newly elected transitional leaders were surprised to find such problems and the Prime Minister himself

said: "We found an underequipped army, undertrained, undernourished, not well housed and in addition kept away from the rest of the nation."¹⁰ In the conclusion of a report I made after a mission to all the military units in the interior of the country during the national conference, I stated after having identified the problems:

There are first the problems linked to the economic and financial situation of our country--that's to say, problems of pay, various allowances, infrastructure, well-being of the soldiers and various allowances not regularly paid--that create discontent in the barracks. We strive to explain the situation to the soldiers, but the political authorities must do the best they can to guarantee this compensation if we want to avoid the discontent that is brewing in the barracks.¹¹

It's revealing that the official reason for the outburst was to claim pay and various allowances.

Third: The "la troupe" event was also the result of a loss of confidence of the soldiers in their superiors. Even if it might have seen a slow and long process, the gradual loss of confidence in the military hierarchy became complete on the occasion of the national conference. Two decisions were considered as the principal reasons for this loss of confidence.

Just before the conference, a decision was made that, consistent with the withdrawal of the armed forces from politics and because a national conference is a highly political arena, they would not participate in this conference. That was the official reason. The real reason was, having perceived the antimilitary trend (the small number of places allocated to the military with no right to vote, etc.) the military thought it would be better to stay out of the conference. Once you are inside you are more vulnerable, whereas when you are outside, your intentions are not known and the conference may be more careful in their criticism. This position was explained to all the military with many convincing arguments, and they supported the decision. Later on, at

the beginning of the conference, when participants asked with insistence for the participation of the armed forces, the military hierarchy was confronted with a problem. What if each side maintains its position? As we mentioned above, a decision had been made not to fight our own people and to participate in the national conference. This decision which seemed very wise was not comprehended by the large majority of the armed force's members, who perceived a step backwards of the military chiefs vis-a-vis the national conference. At least in my opinion, this was characteristic of the unpreparedness of the armed forces for the national conference. The military chiefs should have considered all the eventualities before they took their first decision of non-participation.

Later on, in the Tchintabaraden Affair, when the Chief of Staff denied having given orders to a company commander to execute Tuareg rebels, many thought he was just trying to save his job and that he might shoulder the responsibility.

The shift in the decision of nonparticipation in the national conference and what was perceived as a lack of shouldering responsibility were the major factors in the loss of confidence in the military hierarchy. The soldiers felt that the hierarchy was no longer trustworthy and didn't defend their interests.

Fourth: The "la troupe" event was also the result of a past history of insubordination. The phenomena didn't occur overnight--there was a past history of recent unpunished mutinies. There was the one after the battalion sent to the Gulf War came back; they didn't want to go to the parade scheduled to celebrate the victory because the government didn't give them the money that was promised them right away. There were even some of them who talked to the media about the problem--a soldier on international radio (British

Broadcasting Cooperation (BBC)) and an NCO in a local newspaper (Haske).

However, the most important bad example was the above mentioned "mouvement des lieutenants et sous lieutenants" (movement of first and second lieutenants).

Despite the name, there were more soldiers and NCOs in this movement than officers. The soldiers had the opportunity to rebel against the hierarchy--it was like a rehearsal, and when it came to show their dissatisfaction, they just did it by themselves.

Fifth: The show of force of the soldiers known as "la troupe" may have been the result of politicians' actions. We already noted the will of the politicians to infiltrate the armed forces. The latter remained the sole well-structured and armed organization in the country. The action of politicians within the armed forces can be seen at two levels: the infiltration of political parties and the omnipresence of the government.

Since the early days of the national conference, political parties have been involved in having their "men" among the military personnel.

Begun during the national conference, there was no reason why the political leaders should stop their action during the "la troupe" event. Manipulating the soldiers was an effective way, either to divide the armed forces or to resolve one's own political disputes against an opponent, that these leaders couldn't resist. The doors had been opened by the conference and everybody can access inside the organization. It is relevant to this point to note the President of the High Council of the Republic (Congress) saying about the politicians' infiltration of the armed forces: "It's not the army one must question, but the leaders of the so-called groups (political), to tell them not to introduce politicking and politics in the barracks, or to do it no longer according to the case."¹²

It seems surprising for the military to complain about the omnipresence of the government. The politicians are supposed to provide the guidance and the military to transform this guidance into directives to be executed. In Niger, it seemed that in the relationship between the transitional government and the armed forces, it was not such a clear-cut process.

In the final report on the army meeting called "etats generaux de l'armee" held in October 1992, one of the comments was:

It's up to the political power to take all its responsibilities, but only its responsibilities. That is to say that the political authority assigns the missions, sets the orientations to be given to the action of the armed forces, but must be careful for the sake of the supreme interest of the nation, not to interfere in an institution which has its own principles, its hierarchy, its habits and its restricted rules.¹³

How had the military come to feel that the government officials were exceeding their legitimate role? The new government leaders designated just after the national conference had resolved in their own way what they perceived as the problems in the armed forces. In fact, what the military was complaining about is that sometimes government leaders took decisions that should have been taken at a lower level, on some other occasions, for unclear reasons they took decisions that weakened the principles of the military. If one tries to analyze these considerations, one can find out that they involve some serious issues that had never been raised before in the military. (Either they did not exist or the military ignored their existence.) The problem is, once taken as the basis of a policy, these issues could divide the armed forces and even the entire country. That's why during their "etats generaux de l'armee" meetings the military begged the politicians not to interfere inside their institution "for the sake of the supreme interest of the nation."

In doing so, the Nigerien military tried to do just what the Congolese military did--close the door of the armed forces after the national conference in order to preserve their cohesion and try to "sell" the armed forces as one single package, ready to serve the country but away from the struggle between politicians. If the Nigerien military had met sooner, right after the national conference as they wanted to, the country could have avoided this political/military turmoil.

THE TUAREG REBELLION

On one hand, the Tuareg rebellion in the northern part of Niger is a very broad subject with historical, political, and economical implications. Our purpose here is not to talk about those aspects of the rebellion. On the other hand, if the Tuareg rebellion didn't begin with the national conference, the latter had certainly a big influence on its evolution. It's precisely this link between the national conference and the increase in the rebellion that constitutes the basis of our analysis.

During the conference, the rebellion issue evolved around the Tchintabaraden Affair. It was obviously a very serious issue involving national unity. The way the conference debated this problem neither satisfied the military nor the Tuareg rebels. We've seen above how the discussion of the Tchintabaraden Affair lowered the morale of the military. Yet the rebellion was never as intense as after the national conference. To understand the dissatisfaction on both sides--the military and the Tuaregs--let's take a moment to live the treatment of the affair by the national conference inside each party. But before that, it may be useful to know what this affair is all about.

What is known as "the Tchintabaraden Affair" is an attack on the locality of Tchintabaraden by an estimated group of 27 Tuareg rebels on 7 May 1990 and

the retaliation by the armed forces. During the attack, the rebels killed five persons and nine of the rebels were immediately killed. The army engaged in pursuit, killing several in an engagement tens of miles away. The army also killed some suspects in interrogation. Meanwhile, another group of rebels tried to attack another locality (Tillia) about 100 miles away. They were captured, but the company commander (a captain who was in Tahoua more than 100 miles south) ordered them executed because he had been previously ordered to destroy them in an ambush. All 20 rebels were executed. The same captain had personally killed an old Tuareg suspect in the barracks, because he said the prisoner was badly ill. This was the essence of the Tchintabaraden Affair. A very sad ending including an unbearable and unacceptable human rights and Geneva Convention violation. As we said above, the military were not satisfied with the treatment of the Tchintabaraden Affair by the national conference. While they were annoyed by the exaggeration of the problem by most of the international media, it was essentially the open debate of the problem by the national conference participants and the process that really discouraged them.

The open debate of the Tchintabaraden Affair by the participants in the national conference threatened the military institution in two ways through, first, the damage to cohesion and, second, the disclosure of military secrets. Just before the debate of this affair, several attempts were made by the army leaders to remove this affair from the agenda of matters planned to be openly discussed by the conference and to entrust it to the brand-new Commission of Political, Economical, and Sociocultural Crimes and Abuses for further investigation. The objective of this approach was to prevent the conference from presenting the image of bloodthirsty armed forces to the nation and also to preserve cohesion within the armed forces by preventing the sight of

military accusing other military in front of the nation as the police leaders had done in the previously debated "affairs of 9 February" and "drug affair."

The second concern was that open debate leads always to a search for details, and most of the time to some disclosures. In this environment, military secrets could be revealed to the entire world because the open debate was broadcast live on the radio. Therefore, for the military, it was by far better to do it in the dispassionate climate of an office, in front of the above mentioned commission. Those military who were convicted of crimes would be punished anyway. But, not surprisingly, the conference chose open debate, and all the concerns came to fruition. The image of a captain (the famous company commander of Tahoua) pointing an accusing finger at a general, the President of the Republic (who came in front of the conference for the affair) shocked millions of people, not only in Niger, but in other countries where television showed the sequence.

The second reason for the dissatisfaction of the military was the procedure followed by the conference. In order to safeguard discipline and the hierarchy, army leaders negotiated with conference leaders not to question the subordinates (junior officers, NCOs, and soldiers) about their involvement in the Tchintabaraden Affair. According to the agreement, only the Chief of Staff, the defense zone commander, the company commander of Tahoua, and the commander of the Gendarmerie group of Tahoua had to go in front of the conference. This agreement was broken. The day of the beginning of the debate, the presence of all the military involved in the affair was requested. As a reminder, this requirement was the main cause of the birth of the "mouvement des lieutenants et sous lieutenants." Even if a very late arrangement prevented the NCOs and the soldiers from being questioned, they were sitting in the conference hall. They were charged with crimes as the

officers were. For the other NCOs and soldiers, this accusation was not fair because the subordinates had just executed the orders they were given. These are the reasons why the military was not satisfied with the treatment of the Tchintabaraden Affair by the national conference. We now pose the question of why the Tuaregs were not satisfied either.

Whereas many people might think that the Tuaregs had every reason to be satisfied with the conference's treatment of the Tchintabaraden Affair, the intensification of the rebellion that occurred indicates that they were not. Even putting aside the political and economical decisions that they would have loved the conference to take in their favor which the conference did not take, the Tuaregs were not satisfied. (Contrary to the military, however, more because of the results than because of the process.) The first reason for their dissatisfaction was the nature of the punishment of those responsible for the "massacre." The conference dismissed the Chief of the General Staff and his deputy, put the captain (company commander) in jail and dismissed some police agents and civilians who collaborated with the authorities. That was not enough for the Tuaregs. Obviously they wanted the dismissal of the President of the Republic and all the officers, NCOs, and soldiers who were involved in the operations. The conference did not take these decisions.

The second motive for Tuareg dissatisfaction lay in the reaction of some political parties against the rebels. During the debate, the general impression was:

- o This is not the large scale genocide that the international media talked about;

- o Putting aside the execution cases that are the full responsibility of the authors, the armed forces did their job in repelling aggression; the same captain even got some awkward applause while testifying;

o Everyone, every group which wants to solve its problems by means of weapons must face the security forces and be fought with weapons.

These were not the results expected by the Tuaregs, and one could see their disappointment in the declaration of one of them threatening publicly to intensify the rebellion if the Tchintabaraden Affair were not handled "correctly." Because they in fact began to intensify the rebellion two months after the national conference, it's easy to believe that they were not satisfied with the results.

CONCLUSION

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War, if not the cause of democratization in Africa, constituted at least a kind of force multiplier in the process of democratization on the African continent. Western nations could easily put pressure on African dictatorial regimes and help the brewing protest to emerge without having to care about what the other protagonist in the former Cold War would think or do.

In the former French colonies, democratization took place in part by means of national conferences. The sovereign national conference can serve like an electric shock treatment to get rid of different secular illnesses. We can effectively argue that without this kind of treatment set as an example to discourage future leaders from resorting to the same methods of government, one cannot get rid of incompetence, corruption, and other long-lasting "diseases" that undermine the development of African countries. As Mulei pointed out, "no meaningful development can take place in the absence of democracy and thus no price is too high to pay for a full scale implementation of democracy."¹⁴

But the process itself of going through a national conference is questioned by many African intellectuals. Starting with the intention of

bringing about change, the conference, if not correctly handled, can generate challenges to the national security. Even if in most of the countries people wanted change, were the changes made that people wanted to make? In other words, wouldn't it be better to have homoeopathic treatment--gradual, more minute doses of democracy--instead so that people have time to be educated and to understand and participate in the change?

Yet, one can reasonably argue that in this case, the leaders would have time to stop or divert the process, and it would cost a higher price to Africa in the long run to continue to wait. In dictatorial regimes, the change has to be violent or there simply won't be change. Yet, if the change occurs very fast (as in the national conferences) the people or even the new leaders sometimes have difficulty in adapting to it. In Niger, the former single party, so badly denigrated during the national conference, is now among the parties most likely to win the 1993 presidential elections. In Mali, opposition parties are now complaining about the way the new leaders behave: "The personal mail is opened by state security. Opponents are subject to phone tapping. The opposition parties have no access to radio and television and they are never consulted for the major issues. . . . Little by little, we are evolving toward a party-state system."¹⁵

Another danger of the national conference is the tendency of the democratic forces, confident in their strength after the conference, to continue to dictate their views to the new governments. Elected by the workers, the labor leaders generally prefer to defend the interests of their constituencies against the national interest. As Laouel Kader said:

The emergence of immoderate union power has not represented real progress in the way of maintaining what is essential for every public power--authority. The prime responsibility for this lack of authority rests upon the Nigerien union leaders who preferred to

favor their corporate interests at the expense of the public interest.¹⁶

However, the main danger of the national conferences is that they risk not handling correctly issues related to the armed forces. National conferences in Africa used two different ways to denigrate the existing regimes. One was to focus their criticism on the leaders and their single party. In this case the best thing to do was to isolate the leaders from the armed forces. Otherwise, those leaders can use the armed forces against the democratic process and the result will be the current situation in Togo and in Zaire. The second way was to include the armed forces institution in the regime being attacked. In this case you have to face the reaction of the military and the rise to the fore issues relevant to national security.

Nonetheless, finally, after having been used by the colonial system to repress their own people, after having been neglected by the first post-colonial governments at the expense of the political police or the presidential guards, and after having been involved in politics sometimes against their will by their senior leaders, the African military is now in transition to being led by the new democratic governments. The change of mentality itself is very slow and difficult. Therefore, the forces in charge of the transformation must act carefully. Blaming and humiliating the armed forces as an institution in order to carry out the democratic process may not be the right solution. If today 67.8 percent of Africans think the African military is the most important threat against democracy, it's because errors have been made.¹⁷

But we must not overly dramatize the problems raised by the national conferences. Those problems resulted for the most part from dynamics between

different forces which are all struggling to take a stand in the new democratic environment. The bottom line for the new leaders is to keep this commotion within bounds and not let it become a major challenge to national security.

ENDNOTES

¹Martin Kilson and Mitchell Cohen, Africa, Crisis and Changes, Dissent (Summer 1992), 224.

²Abiola Irele, The Crisis of Legitimacy in Africa, Burdens and Ambiguities, Dissent (Summer 1992).

³Albert Bourgi and Christian Casteran, Le Printemps de l'Afrique, Pluriel Interventions, ed., Hachette 1991, 87.

⁴Francois Soudan, Front du refus, jusqu'a quand? Jeune Afrique, No. 1591, 26 June--2 July 1991, 24.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Jean Pierre Fabre, La Democratic envers et contre tout, Jeune Afrique, No. 1578, 27 March--2 April 1991.

⁷Albert Bourgi, Les Etats generaux de la Democratic, Jeune Afrique, No. 1591, 26 June--2 July 1991, 26.

⁸Maitourama Kadey, Conference National Souveraine du Niger: Un an apres, la realite triomphe face a la theorie, Anfani, No. 5, August 1992.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Amadou Cheiffou, Sahel Dimanche, No. 368, 6 March 1992, 3.

¹¹Tahirou Djibo, Rapport No. 3/206/Clt Secret, National Armed Forces General Staff, Niamey: 4 October 1991.

¹²Andri Salifou, UPDP-Chamoua.

¹³Niger Armed Forces General Staff, Army Estates General, Synthesis on the Workings of the Army General Estates, Niamey: October 1992.

¹⁴Christopher Mulei, Africa Needs Democracy, New African, No. 285, June 1991.

¹⁵Naite Mountaga Tall, Retour au Parti-Etat? Jeune Afrique, No. 1670, 7-13 January 1993.

¹⁶Laouel Kader Mahamadou, La Democratic a l'epreuve, Sahel Dimanche, No. 501, 25 December 1992, 4.

¹⁷Poll, Qui Menace la Democratic en Afrique, Jeune Afrique, No. 1628, 19-25 March 1992.

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